

SPRILIB MULTIMEDIA: NEW DATABASES AT THE SCOTT POLAR RESEARCH INSTITUTE

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ABSTRACT: The current SPRILIB database of the Scott Polar Research Institute is a conventional bibliographic facility containing approximately 130,000 records relating to the international published literature for the polar and cold regions. However, in addition to its large holdings of published literature, the Institute also holds extensive collections of manuscripts, photographs, paintings and artifacts. In SPRILIB MULTIMEDIA, our aim is to bring all of these resources together in a suite of databases to be searched either as a single resource including all material types or individually. A POLAR BIOGRAPHICAL ARCHIVE is also under construction to provide complimentary information on the participants in polar expeditions. This paper describes work-in-progress rather than a completed resource.

The Scott Polar Research Institute (SPRI) is unusual in housing a Library, Archives, Picture Library and Museum together on one site. The Library is the world's largest specialist collection for its subject. The Archives is the largest repository for historic British polar expeditions. Most of these expeditions are also well-illustrated in the collections of the Picture Library, though the latter is now rapidly extending its coverage of more recent subjects and events. The Museum is small but choice with the Arctic expeditions of Franklin and the Franklin Search, and the Antarctic expeditions of Scott and Shackleton particularly well represented. Up until now, these various collections have experienced unequal treatment with regard to detailed cataloguing and indexing. The library has been catalogued and indexed since its origin in 1920 resulting in the development of a very large card catalogue and, since 1985, a rapidly growing bibliographic database (SPRILIB). Recent publications are listed in *Polar and Glaciological Abstracts*, published since 1990 by Cambridge University Press. Accessions lists exist for all other collections, that for the Picture Library providing most detail. A comprehensive manuscripts catalogue has been published (Holland 1982).

The building of the Shackleton Memorial Library, illustrated at this conference by a poster, forms just part of a wider project, the Shackleton Initiative. The central concept underlying this Initiative is to improve access by all possible means to the unrivalled holdings of the Institute. Sir Ernest Shackleton's name and reputation will be known to

all. His son, Edward, Lord Shackleton, gained equal distinction as a politician and statesman with a particular interest in the polar regions. As a student, he was also co-leader of the 1934-35 Oxford University Ellesmere Land Expedition.

In the Shackleton Initiative, access is interpreted in both physical and intellectual terms. Physically, clearly, it is most obviously embodied in the new Shackleton Memorial Library. Collections which have been kept in store for ten or more years will now be placed on the open shelves in the spectacular new building. Equally significantly, installation of a lift means that the library is accessible for the first time to the disabled.

Improving intellectual access is an ongoing process which takes a variety of forms. Improved cataloguing and indexing receives high priority particularly for those collections - the Picture Library and Museum - which have received less attention than others in the past. Next, we wish to make the finding tools so created accessible wherever possible on the Internet. There are some constraints on loading a full Internet version of SPRILIB but these do not apply to the loading of other resources, nor to the loading of subsets extracted from SPRILIB.

Table 1: SPRILIB MULTIMEDIA: current and future projects

Current projects:	ICE AND SNOW	(c. 30,000 records)
	ANTARCTICA RETROSPECTIVE	(c. 33,000 records)
	POLARPICS	(c. 1,000 records)
Future projects:	POLAR BIOGRAPHICAL ARCHIVE	
	SPRI MUSEUM	
	SPRI ARCHIVES	
	possible future subsets of SPRILIB	

Of the initial three databases, two will be subsets of SPRILIB. For the glaciological database ICE AND SNOW, this will in fact be a re-launch but with more references, an improved search interface, and a different address from its previous 1995 loading. ICE AND SNOW is the official database of the World Data Centre C for Glaciology, which is located within SPRI Library. It will be searchable by keyword (title and abstract), author, subject area and geographic region.

The other SPRILIB subset ANTARCTICA RETROSPECTIVE(AR) was described in a poster at PLC16 (Mills 1997). Whilst not exactly as outlined, the new database will perform essentially the same function as there envisaged, particularly when combined with the proposed POLAR BIOGRAPHICAL DATABASE. AR is a bibliographic database and, as its name implies, one which will provide particularly comprehensive coverage for the history of Antarctica. However, more contemporary material will not be excluded. The aim is to complement rather than duplicate the information provided by the COLD database of the Library of Congress (<http://cold.loc.gov/star/login-session3.html>), but whereas that service is strongest for scientific subjects since 1962,

AR is comprehensive for all subjects up to 1961 and offers rather better coverage than COLD for topics such as international law, literature, and other non-scientific subjects from earliest times to the present. The comprehensiveness of AR for the period up to 1961 is the result of an extended cataloguing campaign, the Historic Antarctic Bibliography Project, funded by the British Antarctic Survey. Whilst this project still continues, it has reached such a stage that many of the largest biographies have had their contents added to SPRILIB, AR's parent database. AR will be searchable by keyword (title and abstract), author, geographic region and expedition.

The third of the databases to be established in the initial Internet loading is POLARPICS, the database of the Picture Library. Prior to January 1997, the numerous requests for reproduction of prints and film were handled by the Archives where they generated more work than the Archivist and Curator could reasonably handle. As with other aspects of the Shackleton Initiative, the Picture Library was set up to improve access to the very extensive photographic collections with the objective of reaching a self-financing basis within two years. This objective has already been achieved largely thanks to the exceptional work of the Picture Library Manager, Philippa Smith. With most income coming from a comparatively small number of well-known photographs, an early priority for the Picture Library has been to ensure that the rest of its collection becomes better known and more accessible to those wishing to use it. Good progress has been made in cataloguing the newer collections and in converting the detailed accessions list for loading to the new POLARPICS database. At the time of writing, POLARPICS is accessible only as an in-house database. In the Internet loading, POLARPIC records will be linked to the detailed listings available for some collections and - increasingly - with low-resolution images as the campaign to scan the collection makes progress. Like ANTARCTICA RETROSPECTIVE, POLARPICS will be searchable by keyword (title and abstract), author, geographic region and expedition.

SPRILIB MULTIMEDIA will use the MUSCAT Explorer web-based front-end software. Those familiar with the Institute will be aware of its use since 1985 of innovative probabilistic retrieval programs designed by Martin Porter (see Porter & Galpin 1988). Whilst apparently idiosyncratic to librarians brought up on Boolean methods, Muscat and Muscat-influenced interfaces have proliferated on the WWW to such an extent as to be now standard. MUSCAT Explorer itself is now used on a wide number of prestigious sites of which SPRI is only the most recent. In addition to its ability to provide a search interface likely to appear immediately familiar to most users, being an existing Muscat user will greatly facilitate writing of programs enabling the extraction of records from SPRILIB for periodic updating of the Internet services.

Of the future projects, in time we plan to load Internet versions of the Museum and Archives databases though much work remains to be done here. The POLAR BIOGRAPHICAL ARCHIVE is rather more advanced thanks almost entirely to the work of John Reid, a library volunteer and former FID (i.e. member of the Falkland Islands Dependencies Survey). John has already compiled a card catalogue listing participants in

all Antarctic expeditions from 1898 through to 1945. Entries give full names; birth and death dates where known, expeditions participated in and role in each; medals; and other polar related activities. No attempt is being made to provide potted biographies but in time these records will be loaded with links to the published biographical literature.

With the exception of the glaciological database, ICE AND SNOW, a characteristic feature of all of these resources is that they will be searchable by expedition. That is, for any specific expedition, it will be possible to retrieve:

- all publications describing their activities
- all publications reporting their scientific results (to 1945 for Arctic, to 1959 for Antarctic)
- all photographs and film
- all associated artifacts, including paintings
- all maps either surveyed by the expedition or depicting their activities
- brief biographical information on all participants

Using this feature we shall eventually be able to search across all databases to retrieve all types of material held for all polar expeditions.

In summary, the Scott Polar Research Institute presents unusual opportunities for the design and establishment of interlocking information facilities covering a wide range of materials from conventional publications and grey literature, through manuscripts, to photographs, paintings, sculpture and drawings, and to artifacts of almost every description. We are just at the beginning of this process but, blessed with our new magnificent building, it is clear that we must now attempt to match it with equally magnificent services and facilities.

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